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THE PROGRESS OF SCIENCE

SCIENTIFIC APPOINTMENTS
UNDER THE GOVERN-
MENT

A SCIENTIFIC journal must avoid the discussion of party politics, but it is legitimate to point out that the two leading parties have adopted platforms which, as far as their principles go, might almost be interchanged, and have nominated candidates who have much in common, both of them being lawyers, university professors and sons of clergymen. In view of these circumstances it is of interest to those concerned with science that Mr. Hughes in his first campaign speeches should select as one of his two leading issues the appointments by President Wilson to scientific offices under the government. This would not have been a vital political issue a few years ago, and it is certainly gratifying that it should now have become so, more especially as both parties and both candidates profess the same desirable principles and only dispute about the extent to which they have been maintained.

In opening his campaign at Detroit, Mr. Hughes charged the administration with having displaced the scientific heads of the census and of the coast and geodetic survey with men not having scientific qualifications. The word "displaced" is ambiguous and was perhaps intended to be so, and the reply of the secretary of commerce that both men had "voluntarily retired" is also, and it may be purposely, ambiguous. Men familiar with university affairs, like the two candidates for the presidency, know that professors sometimes have their resignations presented to them. It is allowable to say either that Dr. Wilson displaced Dr. Patten as president of Princeton University or

that Dr. Patten resigned and was succeeded by Dr. Wilson. As a matter of fact, Dr. Durand's resignation as director of the census was forced, and Dr. Tittman, who was sixty-five years old and in indifferent health, resigned voluntarily from the Coast and Geodetic Survey.

The vulnerable point in the action of the administration is the appointment of their successors. Mr. William J. Harris, appointed director of the census, was chairman of the democratic state committee of Georgia and the appointment appears to have been for political reasons, as has unfortunately so often happened in the bureau of the census, where the extension of civil service rules has been least adequate. E. Lester Jones, when appointed superintendent of the coast and geodetic survey to succeed Dr. Tittman, was deputy commissioner of fisheries. His appointment to that office and his promotion to the head of the survey in the same department appear to have been personal rather than political. He has proved to be an efficient executive, but his appointment to both offices certainly violated the principle that these positions should be held by experts.

It can not, however, be denied that there are two sides to this question. Under modern conditions a distinguished man of science is likely to be a good executive, but the number of scientific men available for a position of this character is limited, and it is by no means certain that it is desirable to divert the skilled expert from his research work to an executive position. Another solution of the problem would be to make the heads of bureaus purely administrative officers, to be filled by men used to administrative work, but for the scientific policy of the bureau

to be decided by a committee of its scientific experts and for the more eminent of these to receive salaries not smaller than that of the executive head.

Mr. Hughes has not pointed out, as an impartial judge might have done, that the two scientific appointments mentioned are the only ones in which the president is open to criticism, or that he is the first president who has officially asked the advice of scientific men on such points. At the meeting of the council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Washington on April 22, 1913, shortly after President Wilson's installation, the following resolution, proposed by Mr. Cattell, was passed:

WHEREAS, It is eminently desirable that scientific men especially skilled in their departments be appointed as heads of the scientific bureaus of the government, therefore,

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to communicate to the President of the United States that it is the opinion of the council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that a scientific man skilled in meteorology should be selected as the Chief of the Weather Bureau.

The committee waited on the president who requested the secretary of agriculture to consult with the committee of the association. The secretary of agriculture at that time stated that no appointment in the department of agriculture had been made or would be made for political reasons, or even be given to a man who sought the office. The committee of the American Association called the attention of the secretary to the fact that the National Academy of Sciences is by law the scientific adviser of the government, and the president, as far as we are aware for the first time since the law was enacted in 1863, asked the advice of the academy on an appointment. A committee of experts of the academy recommended three men skilled in meteorology and fitted for the office of chief of the weather bureau, and one of these was appointed by the president. In like manner the commissioner

of fisheries was appointed from candidates proposed by the American Society of Naturalists and the American Zoological Society. In other cases President Wilson has asked and followed the advice of scientific bodies and scientific men, and his record in this respect is certainly better than that of any of his recent predecessors. We can only hope that he himself or Mr. Hughes, as the case may be, will still further improve this record in the course of the next four years.

A NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

THE National Academy of Sciences has appointed, at the request of the president of the United States, an organizing committee to make recommendations concerning a national research council of the United States. This committee, which consists of George E. Hale, director of the Mt. Wilson Solar Observatory, chairman, Edwin G. Conklin, professor of zoology at Princeton University, Simon Flexner, director of the laboratories of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, Robert A. Millikan, professor of physics in the University of Chicago, and Arthur A. Noyes, professor of chemistry in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have prepared a preliminary statement concerning the plans of the council.

Its purpose is to bring into cooperation existing governmental, educational, industrial and other research organizations, with the object of encouraging the investigation of natural phenomena, the increased use of scientific research in the development of American industries, the employment of scientific methods in strengthening the national defence, and such other applications of science as will promote the national security and welfare.

The council will be composed of leading American investigators and engineers, representing the army, navy, Smithsonian Institution and various scientific bureaus of the government; educational institutions and research endowments; and the research divisions